



# **Bloodline:**

## **Tackling Dog Fighting in the**

### **Community**

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## Foreword

William Wilberforce, the legendary campaigner against human slavery and animal cruelty, called animal blood-sports one of the “multiplied plague spots” on England’s complexion, and “sure indicatives” of a “failing state”. He also said they “degraded human nature” and that if people were pursuing them for amusement, then the condition of the people “must be wretched indeed”.

There can surely be no plague more wretched in our communities than that of dog fighting.

In December 2015, League Against Cruel Sports’ research revealed the shocking fact that dog fighting is now taking place every day in towns and cities across the UK. In a ground-breaking report, it exposed a brutal, underground world involving international criminal syndicates and local gangs who were ruthlessly exploiting the trusting nature of our most faithful animal companion. The revelation that family pets are routinely being stolen to be used as ‘sparring partners’ or bait sent shudders of horror down the backs of pet owners and animal lovers.

The League, as Britain’s leading national organisation defending animals from persecution, has now sent investigators into the community to get up close with the perpetrators. We wanted to understand – and help policy-makers and law-enforcement agencies understand - what this cancer looks like and what is driving it to grow. And how we can start fighting back. This report is an account of that investigation.

Dog fighting is one of the most serious animal welfare issues in Britain today; it is also a serious issue of crime and community safety. Animal abuse has consistently been shown to be a reliable predictor of some of the most serious and most violent crimes in the community, including child abuse, domestic violence and abuse of the elderly.

The League will now be stepping up its ongoing investigation into dog fighting in Britain. We will be stepping up engagement with local communities to prevent those at risk from being drawn in. We will be doing further research to help policy-makers and law enforcement agencies better understand the causes, and the potential solutions. We will be partnering with a range of agencies to support the rehabilitation of rescued dogs.

And we will be campaigning tirelessly across the length and breadth of Britain for appropriate penalties to be introduced, and for appropriate action to be taken against perpetrators.

**Eduardo Gonçalves**

**CEO, League Against Cruel Sports**

## Executive Summary

A dog fight takes place in the UK every day. The League Against Cruel Sports revealed this in 2015 as part of a ground-breaking academic report into dog fighting which showed that despite being banned in 1835, this barbaric, cruel 'sport' still thrives in this country.

In addition, dog fighting is not purely a matter of animal welfare. Evidence from this country and abroad points to dog fighting being a 'gateway' crime to serious and organised offences such as drug use and violence. Links between animal abuse and human abuse are also clear. In the United States, dog fighting is recognised as a Grade A felony by the FBI and the practice of tackling dog fighting to prevent other crimes is well established.

What the report also highlighted is a severe lack of information, data and consistency when it comes to those organisations dealing with dog fighting. This inconsistent and flawed approach means that dog fighting cannot be tackled in an effective way.

Following on from the report, we decided to meet the problem head on. For us to get to a national solution for dog fighting, we must first understand the challenges at a local community level. We instigated a pilot scheme – Project Bloodline – which would seek to put real facts and intelligence into the equation so we can greater understand what we're dealing with.

### **Project Bloodline**

Project Bloodline is based on the methodology used by Projects Kraken and Griffin, tried and tested models used by police dealing with terrorism and criminal activity at a community level. The location, the Bedfordshire urban areas of Luton, Bedford and Dunstable, was chosen for a number of reasons, not least because it is a 'normal' area when it comes to dog fighting – prevalence of the activity was judged to be average compared with similar areas.

Initial steps included initiating and building relationships with 60 relevant organisations, groups and individuals ranging from the council and police to animal welfare charities and rescue centres, taxi drivers, shop keepers and community centres. This was followed by both overt and covert operations to gain intelligence as to the scale of the problem, information about those taking part, and insights into how to deal with it.

Among the intelligence gathered was:

- A feral cat colony was being kept to supply 'bait' for dog fighting.
- Dogs are trained for fighting by being 'body slammed' and 'head slammed', techniques involving punching or hitting the dog's head against a wall to toughen them up.
- The bodies of dead dogs, which have been used for fighting, are being dumped near farmland.

- A Staffordshire Bull Terrier which had been used for 'bait' had its teeth ground down so that it could not fight back.
- Lower-level dog fighting – so-called 'street rolling' - continues in a number of locations within the towns, despite the councils having worked hard on the issue within recent years.
- Bedfordshire-based dog fighters seem to have an impact on dog fighting activities in other parts of the country.
- Young people in the pilot towns continue to use powerful breeds of dogs to accord themselves status within their communities.
- Prohibited breeds continue to be bred in the area in order to supply the dog fighting and status dogs market. Prohibited breeds are also crossbred with other breeds to make them more suitable for dog fighting.
- There is a significant clandestine market in the trade of potential fighting dogs – our investigators were offered dogs by a masked man during the operation. Pitbull 'type' puppies were being sold for £1,000.
- Those taking part in dog fighting come from different cultures and backgrounds which in the pilot area included white British, Eastern Europeans, travellers and British Asian.

Additional related issues also need to be taken into account:

- A 76% rise in UK hospital admissions due to dog bites or strikes over a 10-year period to 2015 needs to be analysed more closely.
- Identification of dogs deemed to be 'dangerous', under the Dangerous Dogs Act, is also problematic – during 2014/15, just 5% of dogs seized by 13 police forces in relation to responsible dog ownership were prohibited types.
- Of 623 'banned' dogs seized in the same period, almost a quarter were later found not to be on the prohibited list.

## **PUP – A National Dog Fighting Action Plan**

Intelligence and learnings from Project Bloodline reveal that dog fighting is thriving in the UK. If results across the UK mirror those in the pilot area, then it is safe to say that dog fighting, and the resultant serious criminal activity, exists on a major scale across the country.

Based on our experience and expertise, The League Against Cruel Sports proposes a detailed National Dog Fighting Action Plan which can be rolled out in any area where dog fighting is prevalent.

The Plan comprises many elements, and is based around the three areas of Prevention, Understanding and Prosecution (PUP). Recommendations include:

- The formation of a National Task Force, led by a senior figure in Government, to ensure sufficient collaboration and action takes place to tackle dog fighting across the country.
- Dog fighting should be recorded as a specific offence separate to animal fighting in order to enable the scale of the problem to be more accurately assessed.
- Legislation and penalties for offenders must be clarified and strengthened to ensure those found guilty are punished appropriately. The League would like to see a minimum tariff of three years for convicted dog fighters. Sentencing should reflect the spectrum of offending in relation to dog fighting (from street level dog fighting to organised crime). Rehabilitation programmes should be offered as part of the sentencing mix.
- Details of individuals banned from keeping dogs should be held on a national register by statutory agencies. This would help to prevent those already convicted of animal cruelty offences from being able to commit further offences as well as increasing opportunities for enforcement action.
- Tackling dog fighting should be seen in the context of dog fighting being a gateway crime. Dealing with dog fighting can lead to other crimes such as drugs and gun crime being solved.
- Strategies to deal with dog fighting should follow counter terrorism strategy – engage and prevent.
- The detection of animal fighting offences should become a performance indicator for police forces to add incentive to dealing with the crime, and they should be resourced adequately to enable them to do so.
- Breed specific legislation is fundamentally flawed. The Dangerous Dogs Act should be reviewed as a matter of urgency.

- More research should be undertaken into the links between dog fighting and other crimes, including child abuse and domestic violence.
- Community engagement is vital both in terms of gaining intelligence but also in understanding how to prevent young people becoming involved.

## 1. Dog Fighting in the United Kingdom

Although illegal since 1835, evidence suggests that dog fighting in the UK is in resurgence. A study by criminologists Dr Simon Harding and Dr Angus Nurse, commissioned by the League Against Cruel Sports in 2015 concluded that impromptu street fights or 'rolls' are likely to occur somewhere in the UK every day. Further supporting evidence comes from RSPCA data which shows they received an alarming 3,698 complaints concerning dog fighting between 2010 and 2014. Finally, the League's own investigations within the pilot area across just a four month period have provided some genuine indicators of a current dog fighting problem and it seems logical to infer that these findings would be replicated in other towns and cities across the UK.

The origins of dog fighting in the UK can be traced back to the Roman invasions of Britain, to as early as 43 A.D. Impressed by the ferocity and resilience of the British fighting dogs, the Romans subsequently imported these dogs to Italy where they were used not only in battle, but were also fought for public entertainment. The dogs were later exported across Europe before eventually returning to Britain.

By the 12th century, dog baiting - where dogs fought with bears and bulls in a ring - had become a popular sport, and by the 19th century commercial or public dog fighting had become a highly codified sport organised for the entertainment of spectators. Bull and terrier dogs were specifically crossbred to create faster and more agile dogs for fighting (Harding and Nurse, 2015).

Increasing public sensitivity to animal cruelty led to the outlawing of all baiting activities under the Humane Act of 1835 and further subsequent legislation including the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 and Animal Welfare Act 2006, and sought not only to end dog fighting activity, but also to identify and eradicate the types of dogs most likely to be involved.

However, as highlighted by Ortiz (2010), enforcement of laws that prohibit dog fighting has proven difficult, not least because of burdensome investigatory costs and evidentiary problems. Even when the law is enforced, dog fighting is not a single, easily identifiable offence; but instead entails "an array of different offences" and "an array of different offence types" (Harding, 2014). Added to this are inconsistent recording practices and a lack of researchable data, which further confound attempts to examine the scale and nature of dog fighting and its regional variations. We shall examine these issues in the following sections.



## 1.1 The lack of primary data

***“Dog Fighting is a sport which has historically thrived on its ability to convince society that it does not exist.”***

Christopher Hoff (1981), American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

Harding and Nurse (2015) highlight a lack of primary data concerning dog fighting which they attribute, at least in part, to the way in which offences are recorded. This is supported by the findings of this pilot project. For example, 32 requests were made to police forces in England and Wales under the Freedom of Information Act for data relating to the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, yet of the 22 forces which responded, only 13 were able to provide sufficiently detailed data to support any meaningful analysis.

Likewise, Dan O’Neill of Vet Compass, an international initiative focused on companion animal health, has stated that they do not hold data on dog fighting or dog bites, as this is not even an area they have explored<sup>1</sup>. In other words, nobody knows the magnitude of the issue of dog fighting due to a lack of available data.

Smith (2010) also identifies an overreliance on media reporting for knowledge of an issue. Together with a clear tendency towards sensationalism instead of accuracy, this can prove to be a hurdle for the creation of an efficient policy when it comes to dog fighting (Delise, 2007). Harding (2014) also explored the discursive strategies of the media, conducting a critical discourse analysis to highlight the media’s role in establishing and problematising the issue through the use of sensationalistic and overly dramatic lexical choices.

An example of this is the reference of the media to ‘demon’ or ‘devil’ dogs when a human-canine conflict occurs, with little consideration for the responsibilities of the owners of the dogs. There have also been reports of the media refusing to report about human-canine incidents unless it involved a pit bull, or the media rushing to print stories with little proven facts and even misidentification of certain dog breeds.

Additionally, dog ‘attacks’ are rarely investigated in such a way that reveal *why* dogs attack. Consequently, there has been a pattern of drawing the wrong conclusions about canine behaviour because of a bias towards certain dog breeds. According to an American study, these inaccurate assessments often lead to breed-specific legislation which is not only of no value in keeping communities safe, but has caused much anguish to responsible dog owners and has doomed hundreds of thousands of dogs to exile or death (Bradley, 2014). According

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<sup>1</sup> They are, however, in the process of running a study on undesirable behaviours in young dogs in the UK but this is not yet complete.

to the BBC, the Metropolitan Police alone will be euthanising some 300 illegal dogs seized under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 this year<sup>2</sup>.

However, regardless of the lack of readily retrievable data for dog fighting offences, the League has been able to explore the nature of dog fighting within the pilot area of Bedfordshire - specifically Luton, Bedford and Dunstable - through its multi-agency, collaborative approach and public engagement strategy. This is explored in more detail below.

## 1.2 Legislation

Dog fighting is illegal in the UK. However, specific dog-fighting laws do not exist. Instead such offences are recorded within animal welfare and cruelty acts, which make it illegal to coordinate and promote a dog fight; to keep, possess or train a dog for fighting; and to attend a dog fight as a spectator.

Direct animal fighting offences are recorded under Section 8 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006. However, as the law defines an animal fight as “the placing of a protected animal with another animal or human”, it could be argued that street fighting is “spontaneous” (and as such does not include ‘placing’ an animal), and is consequently not covered by this legislation.

Indirect and associated animal fighting offences are covered under Section 8(2) of the Animal Welfare Act, which states that it is an offence to supply, publish, show or possess a video of animal fighting ‘without lawful authority or reasonable excuse’

Additionally, it is an offence to cause or permit any unnecessary suffering to a protected animal under Section 4(1) of the Animal Welfare Act, which would also include dog fighting.

Other dog fighting related offences are covered by the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. Specifically, Section 1 defines and prohibits ownership of four types of ‘fighting’ dog: the pit bull terrier, the Dogo Argentino, the Japanese Tosa and the Fila Brasileiro – and also makes it a summary offence to breed, sell, exchange, advertise, abandon or give away such a dog; or allow it to be in a public place unless it is muzzled and kept on a lead.

However, UK legislation has had no apparent effect on either dog fighting or the recorded occurrence rate of injuries from dog bites. This is illustrated by data provided by the Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC), which shows a 76% rise in hospital admissions

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<sup>2</sup> BBC News (South East) online 13/4/2016. Figures obtained from a series of Freedom of Information requests to police.

due to dog bites or strikes over the 10 years from March 2005 to February 2015<sup>3</sup>. Analysis of statistics for the pilot area showed that dog bite or strike related admissions in 2015 had increased by almost a third compared with five years ago<sup>4</sup>.

Furthermore, it is likely that dog 'attacks' are rooted in deeper and more diverse socio-economic causes, such as a deprivation and a lack of education concerning the handling of dogs. Indeed, the HSCIC data on dog bites and strikes shows that admission rates were highest in the most deprived areas. As Harding (2014) explains:

"Deprived areas are often more populous with larger families, more children, more pets and more people living in closer proximity to each other and dogs. Also dogs tend to be exercised in public, rather than in gardens or remote fields. At the same time people in poorer areas use dogs for protection, instead of alarms or house insurance and there is an underlying trend towards the use of aggressive Pit Bull-type breeds as weapon or status dogs."

Furthermore, Medlin (2007) argues that human behaviour is ultimately responsible for dog bites, and breed specific legislation to ban the ownership of certain types of dogs merely addresses a symptom of an otherwise unaddressed underlying problem.

Whilst the League recognises the value of certain provisions of the Dangerous Dogs Act, such as Section 3(1)(b) which makes the person in charge of a dog responsible for its actions, statistics relating to this section of the Act further highlight the broader issues around responsible dog ownership as just 5% of the dogs seized by 13 police forces in relation to an alleged offence under Section 3 during 2014 and 2015 were prohibited types<sup>5</sup>.

Another startling statistic is that of the 623 dogs seized as a prohibited type during the same two year period, almost a quarter were later found not to be a prohibited type and returned to their owners, bringing into further question the very concept of what constitutes a dangerous dog<sup>6</sup>. Therefore, the League considers defining specific breeds of dog as 'prohibited' types under the Dangerous Dogs Act as both undesirable and highly problematic.

Harding and Nurse (2015) also highlight the notably low number of convictions for dog fighting offences under these pieces of legislation (see table below):

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3 The Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC) manage a database containing Hospital Episode Statistics. These are details of all NHS outpatient appointments, A and E attendances and NHS hospital admissions for England.

4 Data obtained from a Freedom of Information request to Luton and Dunstable Hospital

5 Data obtained from Freedom of Information requests to 13 police forces. 420 dogs (all types) were seized in relation to an alleged offence under Section 3 of the Dangerous Dogs Act during 2014 and 2015.

6 Based on data from 13 police forces obtained under the Freedom of Information Act during March and April 2016.

2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
2	2	5	2	7	11	8

Currently the maximum sentence for animal fighting in the UK is a term of imprisonment of up to 51 weeks for Animal Welfare Act 2006 offences. However, in reality, sentences are more typically in the region of six months.

In the US, on the other hand, dog fighting is considered a felony (a felony is a serious crime, punishable by imprisonment in excess of one year) in all 50 states, as well as a federal felony, and the number of dog fighting prosecutions is rising.

In 2016, the FBI declared that it is going to track animal abuse in the same way that it tracks Class A felonies (the most serious type) for accounting, reporting and tracking purposes. The United States also appear to be taking steps towards stricter sentencing for dog fighting cases. For example, in March 2016, the West Virginia Governor signed a bill significantly raising the fines for participating in or attending dog fights, and enacting felony-level penalties for repeat offenders.

### 1.3 Public Opinion

Scientists have long established the role of cultural values as facilitators to human progress and it is clear to the League that the overall ethical consensus of the British public is that dog fighting is a negative factor in the community and that it should be policed better than it currently is.

An IPSOS Mori poll from December 2015 showed that 98% of the 2,036 respondents stated that they want dog fighting to remain illegal.<sup>7</sup> However, dog fighting is an issue that persists, as illustrated by the steady number of complaints received by the RSPCA in relation to dog fighting.

Dog fighting should not be seen in isolation. Many dog owners are concerned about dog thefts, often in areas where there are indicators of dog fighting activities. The charity 'Dog Lost' has stated that dog thefts in the UK are on the rise, with an increase of 20% in 2014 compared with 2012, and they estimate that number to be much higher in reality. Also, in April 2015, Staffordshire Newsletter reported that a survey of 5,000 dog owners showed that nine

<sup>7</sup> IPSOS Mori interviewed a nationally representative quota sample of 2,036 adults in Great Britain aged 15+. Interviews were carried out face-to-face, in home, using CAPI (Computer Aided Personal Interviewing Laptops), as part of the IPSOS MORI Omnibus (Capibus). Fieldwork was conducted between 27 November - 10 December 2015. The results were weighted to reflect the known profile of the adult population

out of ten owners were worried that their dog would be stolen. 125 owners had had a dog stolen in the 12-month survey period and 18% believed this was in connection with dog fighting.

Charities have also raised concerns over the rise in the number of abandoned dogs connected to the status dog phenomena. For example, in March 2015 the Daily Mail published a warning by an East Yorkshire-based charity that the number of American bulldogs and Akitas being abandoned was likely to rise, as these breeds were replacing Staffordshire bull terrier-type dogs as the new 'status' breed. The charity also highlighted an increase in the number of irresponsible breeders who are willing to sell dogs to anyone.

#### 1.4 Dog fighting as a 'gateway' or 'broken window' crime

It is evident that dog fighting can destabilise communities. It has been described in literature as a "broken-window" crime (Perdue and Lockwood, 2014). The broken window theory links disorder and incivility within a community to subsequent occurrences of serious crime. It is also a proven fact that dog fighters are often associated with many other crimes, such as serious assaults, the illegal drug trade and even homicides, and that people arrange and attend dog fights as a forum for gambling and drug trafficking. According to the charity PETA, one American detective is reported to have told the *New York Daily News*: "you can get more drugs and guns off the street by breaking up dog rings than you would breaking up drug rings."

Harding (2012, p.135) reported that young men who owned dangerous or status dogs were widely associated with or involved in an extensive range of criminal activity, such as actual bodily harm, threats to kill and drug possession, etc. In evidence of these links, in September 2009 BBC News reported that four people had received custodial sentences after participating in what was labelled one of Europe's largest dog-fighting syndicates, discovered after a BBC Panorama investigation. Links were found between the syndicate and a gang in Northern Ireland with paramilitary connections, who supplied American pit bull dogs. Members of the ring also travelled as far afield as Finland to attend fights.

The relationship between animal cruelty, delinquency and general attitudes has been proven in many studies in the last three decades (Felthous and Kellert S.R. 1986; Coston, 1998; Henry, 2005). Dog fighting can also be a "gateway" crime, leading young offenders into an underground criminal scene (Perdue and Lockwood, 2014). These studies have shown that both observation of and participation in animal cruelty result in greater involvement in a variety of delinquent behaviours, both within the year of occurrence and in later life.

The links between different crime types are often examined in order to understand the dynamics of offending behaviour with a view to facilitating its prevention or detection. Caution is required, however, regarding this approach, as selection bias may influence the type of data collected to generate conclusions about what types of crimes and individuals are connected to dog fighting. Moreover links can be either coincidental or causal. Just because those using or distributing drugs also support dog fighting, does not mean that the two are connected. Anyone committing vice may support dog fighting, for example, including those engaging in prostitution or gambling. Or, whilst a survey might show that those who have been arrested for violent crimes also support dog fighting; it does not indicate that those who have not been arrested do not. All of these questions should be subject to empirical analysis (Chisholm, 2011).

Observations of linkages can also have several implications for police policy. Firstly, there are consequences for the detection and prevention of other crimes. The link between animal cruelty and further delinquency is a proven one. Yet in current police strategies, dog fighting is often considered as an isolated animal welfare issue which, moreover, is usually not seen as a priority. Criminal links are often not followed up resulting in missed opportunities to detect other crime types. Logically, prevention of dog fighting is also important to prevent other types of crime.

Next, there is a clear connection between animal abuse and human violence. In the US, the connection between child abuse and animal abuse is so strong, that the FBI officially considers animal cruelty by a child as a likely indicator of ongoing domestic violence to the child and/or to the partner. The reverse can also be proven: attending fights by young children has a desensitising effect, teaching them violence, cruelty and a lack of compassion at a very young impressionable age, which will lead to further violence in the future (Hovel, 2015). Finally, there have also been proven connections between animal abuse and elder abuse. It can even be used as an indicator of serial killers.

## 1.5 Link with human welfare

If longer term solutions are to be found, then it is also essential to acknowledge the link between dog fighting and socio-economically disadvantaged communities.

David Grant (2010), former director at the RSPCA Harmsworth Memorial Animal hospital, has stated that most people who abuse their dogs share certain characteristics:

“They are usually young, ill-educated males, from poor, unstable backgrounds, live on the worst council estates and are often involved with gangs and drugs and other

crimes. They live outside the law. They have no status, so they seek status from their dogs.”

Harding (2008) has pointed out links between the ownership of status dogs, street rolls and gang cultures. These dogs are often used by youngsters growing up in challenging environments to demand respect, to earn ‘street credibility’, to show their masculinity, for protection, and also as weapons. Therefore, it is crucial to examine the underlying causes of dog fighting.

It is clear that when children do not get the best start in life, they are more prone to delinquency, including dog fighting (McPhedran, 2009). Several initiatives have been taken by the government to mitigate these problems. In 2008, Professor Sir Michael Marmot led an independent review to propose strategies for reducing health inequalities. The report, *Fair Society, Healthy Lives*, identified six policy objectives, the first of which focuses on giving every child the best start in life.

Similarly, the Allen Review of 2011 advocates early intervention (first 3 years of life) as a means of tackling educational and social disadvantages. It is essential that this also encompasses responsible ownership of animals. As Cora Bailey (2015), director of Community Led Animal Welfare (CLAW)<sup>8</sup> puts it:

“The fall-out from dog-fighting is the crime we really have to deal with. In a society in which violence is already deeply ingrained, we emphatically don’t need a new cohort of youngsters growing up without the ability to feel empathy, getting kicks out of cruel and bloody acts – and deeply enmeshed in the world of criminality.”

In sum, whilst the League primarily focuses on the prevention of cruelty to animals in the name of sport, it clearly recognises the importance of taking a holistic multi-agency approach to tackle both dog fighting itself and its socio-economic causes. This can only be achieved through effective partnerships and the delivery of educational programmes concerning animals in socially disadvantaged communities. As Dr Hovel (2015) of the New York State Humane Association puts it: “If violent offenders are made, not born, why can’t we figure out what ‘makes’ them and break the cycle?”

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<sup>8</sup> CLAW is a welfare organisation, renowned as the pioneer of community based primary animal healthcare in South Africa

## 2. Project Bloodline

One of the primary aims of Project Bloodline is to investigate the true scale of dog fighting in Britain today.

The Project draws on the tried and tested methodology used by Projects Kraken and Griffin. Project Kraken is a National Crime Agency, Police, and Border Force initiative, which seeks to protect the UK coastline and maritime environment from criminal activity and terrorism. Similarly, the police initiative Project Griffin aims to deter, detect and disrupt criminal and terrorist activity in cities and communities. The aim of both projects is to develop strong relationships with organisations and individuals from local communities in order to raise awareness of the threat from crime and terrorism and to both gather and share intelligence and information. Both provide a mechanism for reporting potentially suspicious activity and enable solutions to be developed collectively.

The location of the Project Bloodline pilot, urban areas within Bedfordshire, was chosen primarily because of its 'averageness' in terms of dog fighting – prevalence of the 'sport' was seen to be no more nor no less than in other similar parts of the country.

A closer look at the locations gave us four distinct justifications for basing the pilot here:

- 1) Research suggested a number of dogs were stolen, possibly as bait, in that area.
- 2) There was historic evidence of dog fighting in the area, and whilst this has partially been addressed by the local authorities, League investigations show that it is still happening. Our preliminary research of previous cases revealed the following:
  - In 2007, two individuals from Luton were amongst a group of 26 men arrested in Birmingham for dog fighting offences. Both were found guilty of being involved in an illegal dog fight.
  - In 2012, a male from Luton was convicted of possessing a pit bull and for failing to seek veterinary care for the dog following a fight. This male had a previous conviction for Possession with Intent to Supply Class A drugs.
  - In 2014, a 16 year old from Luton repeatedly punched and kicked a Staffordshire type terrier dog in the face and recorded the incidents on his mobile phone. He was subsequently banned from keeping animals for life but being a juvenile his name was never released.



- In 2015 a male and female from Hardwick Green, Luton were convicted of possessing a pit bull terrier and of allowing it to attack another dog they owned at their home address. This was a repeat incident at the same address.

3) Urban areas are culturally and demographically diverse. Harding and Nurse (2015) point out that there are large regional and cultural variations in relation to dog fighting. Issues of ethnicity are also intertwined, as some communities may be more likely to tolerate dog fighting and associated practices due to their different cultural practices and beliefs. For example, dog fighting remains legal in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

4) Finally, this was a logistically achievable pilot in a centrally located area.

## 2.1 Strategy

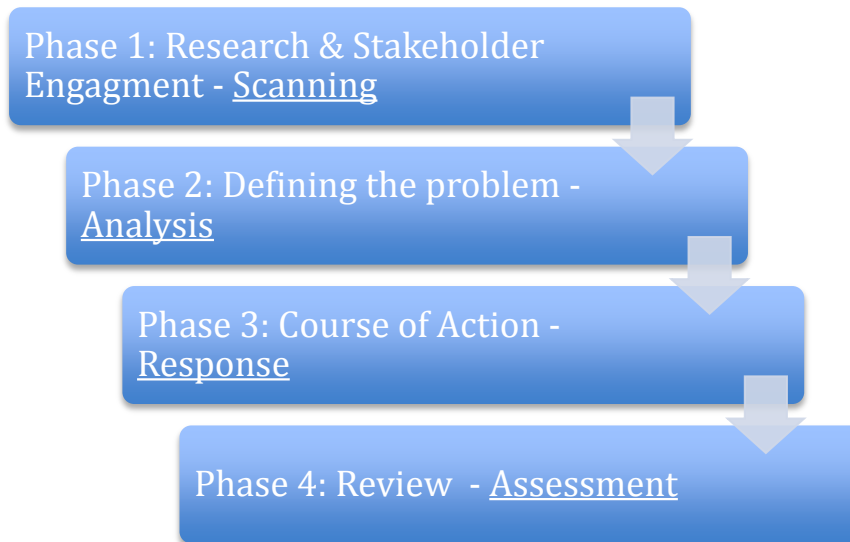
Recent studies in crime prevention have repeatedly demonstrated that strategic crime-control partnerships with a range of third parties are more effective in disrupting drug problems and other crimes than law enforcement-only approaches (Mazerolle and Ransley, 2008).

'Third party policing' involves persuading organisations, groups or individuals such as community centres, veterinarians, schools, local government and business owners etc., to take some responsibility for preventing crime or reducing crime problems. In this way "Crime Control Guardians" are created. Crime control guardians can also be described as a "Multi-Agency Task Force". This is an approach which has been proven in the US to be effective in a number of communities for cases of animal cruelty in general, and for dog fighting specifically (Lockwood, 2012).

Project Bloodline relies on engagement with not only identified third party stakeholders, but also the broader community to initially define the problem of dog fighting and subsequently to identify and implement appropriate solutions. As with Projects Kraken and Griffin, Bloodline offers a confidential means for individuals to report their concerns through its Animal Crimewatch service. A key strength of Project Bloodline may be that the League's confidential reporting line is independent of traditional enforcement agencies such as the police and RSPCA, making it a potentially more favourable reporting platform to anyone directly involved in or on the periphery of criminal activity.

Project Bloodline also draws on the pioneering work of the American law professor Herman Goldstein dating back to the late 1970s and his experiments in Newport News in 1984 on problem-oriented policing. During those experiments it was shown that the police and community could have a significant impact on crime and disorder problems by working together to comprehensively analyse a problem and then implement a targeted response.

Following on from this work John Eck and William Spelman developed the SARA four-step problem solving model in 1987: **S**canning – **A**nalysis – **R**esponse – **A**ssessing Results. Project Bloodline has utilised this model, incorporating these steps into its own methodology which is set out below.



The separate phases of the pilot project are explored in more detail in the following sections. Please note that Phases 3 and 4 are still ongoing at the time of writing.

## 2.2 Phase 1: Research and Stakeholder Engagement - Scanning

The first phase of the project focused on research of and engagement with potential stakeholders. The objectives of this were two-fold. Firstly, given the lack of primary data available, engagement with a broad range of organisations and individuals – both at a national and local level - was considered an essential part of the intelligence gathering process, as well as for identifying other key issues, such as those relating to current policy. The second objective was to establish a multi-partner task force that would be able to collaborate with the League to identify and initiate solutions.

The League initially identified that potential stakeholders should come from the following categories:

- Those responsible for law enforcement, regulation and local problem solving
- Individuals responsible for or with influence on policy and decision making
- Other NGOs with existing expertise, data or an interest in dog fighting
- Other experts who could contribute professional expertise or knowledge
- Those with local professional knowledge
- Those with a local charitable interest and local knowledge of the problem

- Those able to provide local intelligence and help promote the work of the League locally

While it was possible to identify this core group of stakeholders from the outset, it is also evident that stakeholder identification is an evolving process which is subject to continuous enrichment through local level engagement.

In total, the pilot for Project Bloodline involved engagement with over 60 stakeholders from the above categories.

### 2.3 Phase 2: Defining the problem – Analysis

The League can base the findings below on both intelligence obtained through stakeholder engagement and, perhaps more pertinently, its own investigations.

It should be noted that few NGOs have the capability to undertake professional, ethical undercover work due to the level of training and experience needed, especially when working with higher-risk crime areas and in locations where it is likely that other such activity may have taken place by other agencies such as the police.

Our undercover investigations identified a clandestine trade in dogs that are of a type used traditionally in dog fighting. We were offered for sale dogs described as 'pit bulls' and 'bully kutta' dogs. The latter are a relatively new breed to the UK, more usually seen in Pakistan and Afghanistan where dog fighting is legal. The type of fighting they are involved in is different, as it resembles more of a wrestling bout, focussed around strength rather than biting. A previous investigation by the League identified that the availability of these dogs has increased in the UK, with dogs imported from Asia, often through Eastern Europe, where some vets falsified documentation to allow importation outside of the UK's legal requirements.

The dogs offered for sale in Luton were described as bred in the town and priced at £800 to £1,000 each. There appeared to be an almost limitless supply. Many of these dogs are likely to be considered as a prohibited type under S1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act. Undercover meetings took place in dark alleyways in the town and the seller used a facial covering during the transactions.

During the pilot project (up to the time of writing) more than 40 intelligence reports were processed concerning dog fighting or potentially related issues in the pilot area. This was in addition to other non-location specific intelligence and intelligence relating to other locations. Based on the intelligence obtained during just this short pilot period it is possible to make the following inferences:

- Street level or impromptu fighting continues in a number of locations within the pilot area.
- Bedfordshire-based dog fighters also seem to have an impact on dog fighting activities in other locations.
- Young people in the pilot area are using powerful breeds of dogs to accord themselves status within their communities.
- Prohibited breeds (under Section 1 of the Dangerous Dogs Act) continue to be bred in the area in order to supply the dog fighting and status dogs market.
- Intelligence indicates that there is a significant clandestine market in the trade of potential fighting dogs in the pilot area.

Specifically, intelligence obtained for the pilot area has told us that:

- Status dogs are regularly exercised at a specific location during the afternoon.
- Two other areas are locations for street fighting and the exercising of status dogs.
- Pit bull-type dogs and bulldogs are 'rolled' at another location. (A League investigator found evidence of damage to trees suggesting the training of dogs at this location.)
- Dogs, including pit bulls, are being fought at one location where other violent crime is reported to be prevalent. Other historic intelligence identifies another dog fighting location.
- A feral cat colony is being kept to supply bait for dog fighting which takes place at a number of locations within the pilot area.
- Pit bulls are being bred for fighting and sold for £1,000 a puppy. Those involved also train fighting dogs by making them hang from suspended tyres to strengthen their jaws. This has been linked to the Asian community.
- A puppy bought as a Staffordshire bull terrier turned out to be pit bull. The dog was eventually euthanised having spent seven months in kennels and lived in five different homes.

- The Presa Canario breed of dog is increasingly popular in Luton and is being crossbred with other breeds.
- There is seasonal dog fighting activity which is believed to be connected with the Traveller community in Luton.
- The bodies of dead dogs which have been used for fighting are being dumped near farmland alongside a major road within the pilot area.

In addition to the findings above, the League can also reveal the following two alarming case studies.

### Case Studies

- A family involved in dog fighting in Luton are reported to have trained their dogs by 'body slamming' the dogs. This is said to involve sitting directly upon the body of the dog for up to two hours and punching the dog violently each time it moves. 'Head slamming' is another technique where the dog is thrust head first into a wall in order to harden the skull. The same method is said to be used to kill a dog which has been defeated in a fight. These techniques are reportedly used to increase aggression towards other dogs but not towards the owner. Owners of status dogs are considered 'hard' due to their own violent behaviour and this is said to command them respect within the community.
- Intelligence reported that in 2015 a Staffordshire bull terrier cross from the Bedford area was taken into kennels having been used as a bait dog. The dog's teeth had been deliberately ground down and it had scarring to its legs and face. Another Staffordshire cross that had been used for fighting was reportedly seized by police from its owners in Bedford having been used as payment for a debt. Both dogs have since been successfully rehomed.

### 2.4 Phase 3: The course of action – Response

The League proposes a holistic course of action based on counter-terrorism strategies such as CONTEST, the main UK strategy for combatting terrorism. The CONTEST strategy<sup>9</sup> is divided into four strands with the following objectives:

- Pursue: to stop terrorist attacks

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<sup>9</sup> (Home Office, 2011)

- Prevent: to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism
- Protect: to strengthen our protection against a terrorist attack
- Prepare: to mitigate the impact of a terrorist attack

As this is a terrorism-based concept, it is appropriate to adapt this model to fit the specific requirements relating to dog fighting in order to develop a unique strategy which is still based on tried and tested systems.

The League's dog fighting strategy will therefore be organised under the following headings although, as in the strategy above, it is recognised there will be some crossover between each strand.

- Prevent and Deter
- Pursue and Defend

### **Prevent and Deter**

This will be the primary objective for the League. It essentially means introducing measures to stop people from becoming offenders in the first place. This can be achieved in a number of ways, including targeting high-risk groups or individuals, or 'target hardening' locations where dog fighting is believed to take place.

Prevention strategy involves partnership working and the utilisation and enhancement of existing prevention programmes, such as The Dogs Trust's education plan, in areas where dog fighting occurs. Other work will focus on increasing social awareness through community outreach. Deterrence should also come in the form of stronger sentences for offending.

The League can actively contribute to the deterrence of potential offenders. However, it is important to keep in mind that spatial and temporal displacement of crime can occur when intervention is focused on reducing a problem in one particular place or situation, but others nearby are not protected. For example, putting visible surveillance cameras in identified problem areas in one local authority area can displace the problem to another. During the course of this pilot, the League have learnt that where local stakeholders have fiscal and geographic ownership of dog related issues there is, indeed, likely to be a displacement effect. Therefore, it is critical that this is seen as a National Strategy requiring national policy and engagement with national stakeholders.

### **Pursue and Defend**

Merging the concepts of 'pursue' and 'defend' links investigation strategies with education and increased cognisance of dog fighting issues.

To pursue means to detect and investigate dog fighting at the earliest possible stage, and when it does occur, to prosecute those responsible. 'Investigation' should not be seen as one-dimensional; instead, investigations should be community-based, involving a multi-agency task force which responds to accurately assessed data and intelligence. This may include undercover investigations, however equally it may include a local training and awareness input in an identified 'hot spot'.

Establishing a task force that is able to collect and analyse data and information will aid in the process of detecting dog fights. Additionally, the League's Animal Crimewatch line will contribute to the early detection of dog fighting activities. Once established, a constant dialogue will need to be maintained between all agencies involved in order to sustain momentum.

Investigations may highlight a need to Defend. Action under this strand could include the possible removal of training grounds for fighting dogs or educating people on the possibility of their pets being stolen as bait animals etc. Whatever the course of action, it is vital that lessons learnt in one area are considered for replication elsewhere, or even on a national scale. This is a real strength of the programme.

### **The Role of the League Against Cruel Sports**

With the further roll out of Project Bloodline, it is likely that the League will become the go-to organisation for dog fighting issues. This is justified for the following reasons:

- As a National NGO, the League is able to gather information from across the UK through its confidential reporting line, Animal Crimewatch.
- The League has the capability to analyse information gathered, and to develop a structured engagement plan involving both partner agencies and local communities.
- The League is believed to be one of the only NGOs that can bring in undercover-type operatives. Undercover work not only potentially collects evidence but also has reach into different communities.
- Lastly, the community partnerships developed during the initial phase of Bloodline can problem-solve collaboratively, developing a wide range of options which can subsequently be implemented elsewhere.

## 2.5 Phase 4: Reviewing Program Effectiveness - Assessment

This final phase of the SARA problem-solving strategy involves the evaluation of action taken in order to assess its effectiveness. This is an ongoing process at the time of writing.

Additionally, this report and others that precede it have found that data and information relating to dog fighting is poor. SARA can only work once sufficient material to understand a problem has been obtained; therefore the primary objective of this pilot was to address some of these knowledge gaps.

However, it is important to consider how efficacy should be measured. Total elimination of the problem is unlikely to be realistic due to dog fighting being embedded in the criminal fraternity (Smith, 2011). However, measures of effectiveness could include the following:

Prevent and Deter strand:

- A decrease in the volume of complaints about dog fighting. This could be measured through the League's Animal Crimewatch and RSPCA data, but only after a period of proper data collection.
- A reduction in fear of dog theft linked to dog fighting. This could be measured through the volume (or lack) of media reporting and surveys.
- A decrease in the number of related crimes such as dog thefts and other incidents. This could be measured through police and other stakeholder data
- A decrease in the number of dog bites or injuries potentially connected to fighting dogs. However, this would require better recording systems.
- Increased public satisfaction in relation to the way dog fighting issues are dealt with. This could be determined through surveys, interviews and focus groups.
- Better integration and acceptance in the community of dogs typically considered as 'status dogs'. This could also be measured through public surveys, interviews and focus groups.

Pursue and Defend strand:

- An increase in the number of cases of dog fighting being reported.
- An increase in the number of arrests and prosecutions for dog fighting or dog fighting related offences. This will require dog fighting to become a recordable offence.
- An increase in data on the number of other crimes that are detected as a result of investigating dog fighting.



- Neighbourhood indicators showing a reduction in dog fighting, such as decreased usage of parks for dog training for fights. This could be measured through environmental auditing of hot spot locations.
- Examples of good practice from one location being implemented in another on account of the SARA problem-solving methodology being applied to the investigation of dog fighting.

### 3. Proposed National Dog Fighting Action Plan

If it is accepted that dog fighting remains a major criminal issue in the UK, both in itself and also as a gateway crime, then it must be tackled as a matter of urgency.

While excellent work linked to dog fighting is already being carried out across the country, including prevention measures by some local councils or police forces through to the vital work achieved by animal rescue centres, a successful approach must be far more collaborative, joined-up and planned.

We recommend the formation of a National Task Force, led by a senior figure in Government, to ensure sufficient collaboration and action takes place to tackle dog fighting across the country, working with the League and others. They should adopt a National Dog Fighting Plan to tackle the issue.

We present here an overview of what the League Against Cruel Sports believes would be a credible National Dog Fighting Action Plan, which would be pinned around three key areas:

 Prevention

 Understanding

 Prosecution

#### 3.1 Prevention

The greatest numbers of people involved in dog fighting are at the 'street' level. These could be young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who either deliberately get involved in dog fighting for personal prestige or financial gain; or who accidentally get involved due to them owning a status dog which leads to a challenge on the street.

At this level, prevention is very feasible, and can be achieved in a number of ways:

- Details of individuals banned from keeping dogs should be held on a national register by statutory agencies. This would help to prevent those already convicted of animal cruelty offences from being able to commit further offences as well as increasing opportunities for enforcement action. The Metropolitan Police, which submits data to the National

Offender Monitoring Scheme as standard, should be seen as an example of good practice of this that could be rolled out nationally.

- At a community level, the public needs to be educated about the scope and signs of dog fighting. Greater understanding of the problem will lead to increased intelligence and more opportunities to prevent fights happening.
- Community-working groups, set up by the League, can aid in the education of people around signs of dog fighting.
- Environmental auditing of dog fighting hotspots can also be undertaken by multi-agency task forces to identify and remove environmental factors that enable dog fighting. These could include the presence of trees suitable for training fighting dogs or the availability of areas concealed from public view.
- Increased awareness of how to report concerns about dog fighting, such as via the League's confidential Animal Crimewatch line, will lead to more opportunities to prevent dog fights.
- The League suggests a greater recognition and support of programmes developed by our partners at Dogs Trust, Blue Cross and Battersea Dogs and Cats Home. The League would support the work being done on animal welfare/responsible pet ownership education programmes in socially disadvantaged communities. In the US, certain community-led programs have already been proven to be effective. Examples of this are D.A.W.G, (Dog Advisory Work Group), Lug-Nuts and the Pit Bull Rescue in San Diego (Searle, 2008).
- The League will work with partners to ensure that dogs trained for fighting and 'bait' animals that survive are properly rehabilitated.
- Police officers and other 'field agents' need to be trained to recognise the indicators of potential dog fighting activity.
- Dog fighting should not be seen as operating in a vacuum. Reports of dog fighting activity should be brought to the attention of police teams involved in investigating drug supply, gun crime, counter terrorism and other organised crime.
- Specialist units involved in child protection and domestic violence should be made aware of all intelligence relating to animal fighting, in order to consider intelligence cross over.

- There should be more police engagement on dog fighting crimes. The Police & Crime Commissioners, elected officials in England and Wales charged with securing efficient and effective policing in their respective areas, have been identified as the key stakeholders to convince for a change in policy around dog fighting issues. A Police & Crime Commissioner can instruct police officers to incorporate these policies into police investigations.

### 3.2 Understanding

As identified by both our academic report and our work on the ground, national understanding of the dog fighting problem is somewhat lacking. The quality of data, and the way in which we gather it, both need improving. We need to increase public awareness and understanding of the problem, and we need to further research the links between dog fighting and other crimes.

- Dog fighting should be recorded as a specific offence separate to animal fighting in order to enable the scale of the problem to be more accurately assessed. The specific activity of 'street rolling' should be named as this type of dog fighting is often impromptu but just as damaging as planned dog fighting. Recording dog fighting as a specific offence would also help to identify cultural/regional specific problems and the policing resources required to respond to such problems.
- The detection of animal fighting offences should become a performance indicator for police forces. However, the police must also be given adequate resources to investigate cases of animal fighting in the first place.
- Eventually, there may be a need to formally recognise the crime control and prevention roles of agencies other than the police in respect of dog fighting. The performance, funding and accountability of these other agencies would need to be considered.
- More in-depth research is required to find evidence of the links between dog fighting and other issues. Application of criminology and crime prevention research can raise awareness of this issue and offer useful new ideas and hypotheses for prosecutors, police, and other groups to examine. Specifically, research should include the following areas:
  - The link between dog bites and dog fighting.
  - The effect of Breed Specific Legislation on the prevalence of dog bites.

- The link between dog fighting offences and other crimes, such as drug-related or violent crime, in order to further evidence the need for a holistic approach.
- The link between human abuse (child abuse and domestic violence) and animal abuse (in this case, dog fighting).

### 3.3 Prosecution

Prosecution of offenders should work on two levels: both as an appropriate punishment for those involved in crime, and also as a deterrent to those considering becoming involved. Scale of punishment is important; the League also believes that given the nature of the crime and of those taking part, rehabilitation of offenders should be given due consideration.

- Legislative approaches to preventing crime may or may not work, depending on the enforcement and motivation to prosecute (Chisholm, 2011). Therefore public, political and police determination to eradicate dog fighting must be backed by action on the ground.
- Great Britain has some of the most lenient laws in Europe in relation to dog fighting. Sentencing needs to be reconsidered to bring it in line with that of other administrations both in the UK and the rest of Europe. This varies from two years (France), three years (Germany), and five years (Northern Ireland). At 51 weeks, the maximum sentence for England and Wales is too low to be a deterrent, particularly when considering that the reality tends to be around the six month mark. The League would like to see a minimum tariff of three years for convicted dog fighters.
- Linked to our recommendation of increased sentencing in cases of dog fighting, we believe rehabilitation programmes should be offered as part of the sentencing mix.
- The League believes that sentencing should reflect the spectrum of offending in relation to dog fighting (from street level dog fighting to organised crime). Therefore, it is suggested that lower-grade offenders should receive sentences appropriate to the needs of the community. These should seek to effect structural behaviour changes in young offenders and tackle the underlying causes of offending.
- More research is required to assess which community sentences would have the most positive effect on the rehabilitation of offenders. For example, a young offender could be given responsibilities in an animal shelter in order to build his self-esteem, but would also learn positive interaction with animals and respect for other living beings and

consequently, be less likely to re-offend. A well-evidenced framework should be written for the purpose of education of magistrates on this topic.

- Whilst the League values some aspects of the Dangerous Dogs Act, such as Section 3(1)(b) which makes the person in charge of a dog responsible for its actions, we believe that breed specific legislation is fundamentally flawed. For example, breed specific legislation does not factor in the owner, dog's personality, or training, and it has also been pointed out that banning certain dogs makes them more likely to become 'status' breeds. Therefore, the League believes that the Dangerous Dogs Act should be reviewed.
- In the meantime, the League would ask for more police resource to be diverted from enforcing this flawed legislation into tackling dog fighting.

## Conclusion

Dog fighting is an outrage, but it takes place on our streets every day. People may not believe this if they don't see it first hand, but it is there – you only have to look closely enough. That is what we have done.




Dog fighting thrives from its invisibility, so a major part of eradicating this horrific 'sport' is to draw it out into the light. This can only be done through a collaborative approach, as many agencies, organisations and individuals touch dog fighting in some way, but there is little joined-up thinking or data sharing, meaning the opportunities to prevent, understand or prosecute often slip away.

The League Against Cruel Sports believes that our National Dog Fighting Action Plan, using the PUP technique, is the most effective way forward in tackling this crime. The approach mirrors that of established anti-terrorism strategies because of the clandestine nature of both crime types. The proven connection between dog fighting and other crimes such as drug use and violence should alert us to the 'gateway' nature of this activity, and the knock-on effect it has on the towns and cities in this country.

The League Against Cruel Sports has a long history of tackling animal abuse. We have the experience and knowledge to take on the challenge of eradicating what is not only an abomination to animals and a gateway crime, but also a stain on the landscape of an 'animal-loving' nation. We call on others to join with us in tackling this outrage.

## Talk to Us

For more information on this report or on any aspect of dog fighting, please contact the League's **Animal Crimewatch** service:

-  By telephone: 01483 361 108
-  By e-mail: [crimewatch@league.org.uk](mailto:crimewatch@league.org.uk)
-  Online reporting form: [www.league.org.uk/crimewatch](http://www.league.org.uk/crimewatch)

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